

## Transformation of Folk tunes into Ragas of Classical Music

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*Historically speaking, many Indian folk tunes in folk songs and traditional folk musical forms were enriched and transformed into ragas of classical music at the hands of the great composers. Indian ragas are of two types in Indian classical Music.*

1. The sanchara-based ragas that are traditional and are in existence for a long time
2. The swara-based ragas that are new ragas and have come into use in the modern period.

As many of the ragas in classical music are *sanchara*-based, one finds the transformation of traditional Folk tunes into the realm of classical music of India. The usage of melodic phrases in folk melodies finds a place in some of the ancient ragas of Indian music. The term 'raga' has been mentioned by Matanga in his work Bruhadadesi though tunes or 'dhuns' were in existence before his time. Folk music is the first musical expression of men and women. This concept has been accepted universally.

Folk music is defined as the music which has developed and exists among the people as an integral part of their daily life. The classification of the other styles of music such as devotional and classical are made later. These styles have evolved or developed from the music of the people. The Oxford companion of music says that 'it is very evident that the germ of all music lies in Folk Music.'

The characteristic features of tunes are the following:

1. Repetitiousness of the melody.
2. Tunes are set on short and attractive '*chalan*' or melodic movement with isolable basic patterns than on complex structuring of the melody on a larger scale which may be elaborated further.
3. In the tunes, the sancharas or melodic phrases and the text are considered to identify the name of the tune and never with a scale which has a name.
4. Every tune has a clear identify. At the cadence or at the end of the musical phrase there tend to be more consistent note and phrases. It is this constant factor that helps to give the tune its identity. The identity of a tune not only depends on these so-called diagnostic notes and diagnostic intervals, there are also typical melodic tunes and credential formulas. Even the pattern of distribution of the syllabus against the melodic frame work can characterize a tune. The tune is also identified with the song text.
5. Tunes are complete in themselves though in a minor way.
6. Tunes do not allow melodic elaboration as the text is fixed tight with the tune.

7. The range of the tune is limited within an octave but never more than an octave. Tunes are sometimes set with only three or four notes in the folk songs.

The transformation process of a folk tune into a raga of Indian Music is a smooth transition with the expansion of the folk tune by:

1. The extension of the range by having a minimum of one octave.
2. Framing a scale for the tune within the octave.
3. Codification of rules for the elaboration of the melody within the framework of the scale.
4. A name for each scale for its identity of the Raga.
5. Melodic pattern with certain type of *gamaka* within the framework of the same scale will also give the identity are called allied ragas. For example, in Carnatic Music, the raga *Salagabhairavi* and raga *Mukhari* carry the same scale, but retain the identity with a different pattern and *gamaka* [ornamentation].

The ragas that are used in devotional music do not have the extensive ragas one finds in the ragas used for compositions in classical music but are set in scale with a name to identify each raga.

The melodic patterns of ragas are repetitive in devotional music compositions and prominence is given to the text like in the folk songs. In the compositions which belong to the realm of classical music the melodic patterns will be more extensive and different for each section, unlike the devotional music compositions wherein the music is repetitive in the sections. Raga is more important in classical music.

Thus the transformation from folk tunes to ragas occur smoothly first in the melodies of devotional music which has a scale with a name for the raga. It is the second stage of development where many of the characteristic features of folk music figure in the ragas set for the devotional music compositions.

The third and final stage of the transformation takes place as a full-fledged raga form with the specific formulated characteristics. They are thirteen in number, according to Indian musical treatises, with a specific scale and a name for the raga melody to give them a clear identity. The melodic patterns are expansive, have a wide range for melodic movement and give scope for Raga *Alap* for the performer of Indian classical music.

Composers of Indian classical music use the full-fledged raga for their compositions. Raga can be defined as a melodic entity with a scale and having marked individual characteristics of *graham* [beginning note], *Amsa* [important notes] and *nyasa* [resting notes] and *shruthi*-based ornamentations [*gamaka*] in the melodic phrases of *kampita* and *jaru* varieties. The name for the melody is given to identify the different scales of the ragas and to bring out the personality or *roopa* of the Raga. As many ragas of Indian music are *sanchara*-based, it is possible that many folk tunes have

transformed into classical ragas at the hands of the great composers with technical beauties.

A study and analysis of the transformation process of folk melodies have taken place in the course of time and are handled in the devotional music or *bhakthi sangeetha* as a raga with a scale. Though the range is limited and the repetitions of the melody found in folk songs is found in different stanzas, from this second stage of development, melodies become full-fledged ragas with a wide range and an expansive use of the melodic phrases characteristic of the classical music of India. Raga is a unique melodic entity of Indian Music based on the *sancharas* or *chala* to establish their identity though the scale [*aroh* of *avaroh*] takes an important role in the raga structure. It may be said that *swara*-oriented ragas developed recently within the past three hundred years from the seventy-two *melakartha* scheme introducing new ragas with permutation and combination of notes in an octave with even three notes Sa-Ma-Pa in the scale and naming the scale *Omkari* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Before the concept of ragas, there were many regional tunes or '*dhuns*' or *mettukal* for the regional folk songs. The tune is identified with the song text. For example in Tamilnadu, the '*killilanni mettu*' '*aananda kallippumattu*' and the '*kaavadisindhu mettu*' are the most popular *mettukal* [tunes]. Tunes are not named like ragas like Kalyani, Thodi etc.

The development of folk tunes to classical raga is smooth transition of the simple melody into complicated raga.

Each musical sound has two fundamental qualities - pitch or frequency and duration. Both enter into a succession of pitch plus durational values in a melody. For example, let us take the raga Punagvarali which is by composers of pre-Trinity [Sri Kshetraiya] and the Trinity Saint Tyagaraja, Sri Muthuswamy Dhikshitar and Sri Syama Sastri and composers of post-Trinity period in their compositions.

The tune or the '*mettu*' of an ancient folk songs of Tamilnadu, '*Velli kizhamai*', runs as follows:

sssss---	smgm	rgamr ssrrsn:
<i>Vellikizhamai</i>	<i>valliava</i>	<i>vidumozhiyele</i>
sssss	srga rssr	ggrs rssa :
athaimavan	po-le velvaru	kudamozhu vinaram

This *mettu* or tune is used with a different melodic movement and played in the folk instrument called '*Magudi*' by snake charmers. This instrument has a drone pipe along with a playing pipe with holes. The tune with different melodic pattern from the earlier folk song is played with the drone sound along with the melody. The tune sounds highly pleasing and mystic. The tune came to be known as '*Magudi*' in folk music.

Folk melody is used in devotional music in '*Siddhar Padalgal*', for example — '*nadar mudi melirukum*' and the devotional *krithis* of Saint Tyagaraja, for example - '*tava dasoham*'. The *Pambhatti Siddhar* song in the above mentioned '*nadar mudimelirukum*' has a mystic and philosophical meaning.

The notes that figure in this folk tune are *Shuddha rishaba*, *Chatusruthi rishaba*, *Sadaranagandarva*, *Suddha Madyamam Panchama Suddha Daivatha*, *Kaisiki nishada*, *Kakali nishada* and *shadja*. The higher limit is *madya dhaivata* and the lower limit is *mandrastthaji nishada*. In classical music, the raga *Punnagavarali* is the name given to this folk tune. The treatment of the folk tune is very different in classical raga music though the notes are the same.

The scale is framed for the raga as the scale is one of the requirement or characteristics of a raga. The scale runs as follows. Ni sa ri ga ma pa da with both varieties of *rishaba* and both varieties of *nishada*. It is known as the *Bhashanga* variety of raga. The *madhyama* note alone is sung as a plain note and the other notes are sung with *gamaka*.

The folk tune was popular in yesteryears. Nadaswara Vidwan Thiruvengadu Subramanya Pillai and flute maestro T.R.Mahalingam used to play the *Magudi* tune at the end of their classical music concert which used to be the listener's favorite.

Since it was handled by snake charmers, when the tune was transformed into a classical raga in the hands of the composers of classical music of Carnatic Music like Shri Kshetrappa, Saint Tyagaraj, Sri Muthuswamy Dhikshitar, Sri Syama Sastri, Swathi Thirunal, Gopalakrishna Bharathi and others, the raga was named '*Punnagavarali*' reminding listeners of the '*Naga*' or serpent association.

In the Raga *Punnagavarali*, the *Kakali Nishada* was dropped but retained both the *rishabas*. This derivative *sampoorna* raga is assigned to the 8<sup>th</sup> *Mela Hanumathodi* as its parent scale and considered as *Eka Anyaswara bhashanga* raga. Since this raga has transformed from the folk melody *Magudi*, the scale does not touch the octave *shatja* or *tara shadja* and remains as '*Dhaivatha Antya*' raga [*Dha* of *Madhyama sthayi* as the high note.]

The ***lakshana*** [pattern] of the Raga Punnagavarali according to Venkatamahi is—

“Mandra shadja Nishadaaordva,  
Dhaivatha Anta Pramanakaha,  
Syath Punnagavaralisthu,  
Sa graham;;Sarvakalikaha”

This raga can be sung at all times. This verse is given in the '*Sangeetha Sampradaya Pradarshini*', an authoritative music theoretical work by Subbarama Dhikshitar.

**In the explanation, Subbarama Dhikshitar says in *Sangeetha Sampradaya Pradarshini* that the raga is *bhashanga*, *sampoorna Shadja gradha*, *Rakthi* raga, *Sarvakalika* raga but night is more suitable. The '*Panchasruthi Daivatha*' is used as *anya swara*.**

The transformation process of a tune into a raga is a smooth transition of the melodic format of the tune to devotional music or *Bhakthi sangeetham* where the melody structured within the framework of a scale sparingly using the *anya swara*. The name *Punnagavarali* ragam is given to the folk tune but the melodic phrases which bring out the *Bhava* or identity of the tune is retained. The melody is repetition in the devotional song which is the main characteristic of the folk songs. The third stage or final stage of

the transformation of the folk tune is the classical compositions such as the *padam* and *kriti* form. In the devotional category, *keertanai* and *Daru* forms use the folk melody.

In the classical *krithis*, Muthuswami Dhikshitar has avoided the repetition of the melody in the *Anu-pallavi* and *Charanam* sections. In the *Padam* of Kshetrappa, the repetition of the melody in the *charanams* is followed.

Sri Syama Sastri also followed the repetition of the melody in the *charanam*. The *kampitha* and *jaru gamakas* are used in the classical forms such as *krithi* and *padam* and the ornamentations being the *roopa* or the identity of the raga with its *sancharas* or melodic movements.

In the same way, the *dhun* or the melody of the folk tune changes into a classical raga in Hindusthani music. The tune *Sindhu bhairavi* turns into *Bhairavi* raga which is used in *Dhrupad* and *Khyal*. *Sindhu Bhairavi*, a melody belonging to folk music is used in the Punjabi 'Heer', a regional folk song, and also in many *bhajans* a devotional music form of Meera Bhai, Surdas, Kabir and others.

When the folk tune transforms into a classical raga, the raga remains *sanchara*-based raga while the raga which comes out of the scale remains *swara*-based raga or scales-oriented raga.

Ragas are unique forms of Indian music and their musical entity is based on *sancharas* or melodic movements. Many folk tunes which have originated from *sancharas* have turned into ragas.

Ragas can be described as melodic entities with a fixed scale and having marked individual characteristics of *graham*, *Amsa*, *Nyasa swaras* and *Shruthi*-based ornamentations **of Kampitha** and *Jaru gamakas*.

The music cultures of the world which do not have the 'Model' concept adhere to scales. An analysis on the process of transformation from tunes to ragas shows that a smooth development process has taken place in the adaptation of folk melodies first in the realm of devotional music as full-fledged ragas.